

Superstitions - 1934.

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Guadeloupe Voodoo Worshipers

Negroes of French West Indian Colony Defy Succession of Governors and Continue Their Sinister Rites

Louis J. Bouge, the new Governor of the French colony of Guadeloupe, in the West Indies, is having a hard time to show the Voodoo worshipers of that island the error of their ways, according to advice from the correspondent of the New York Times at Port of Spain, capital of the British island of Trinidad.

The advice is based on the revelations made by the French writer, Jean Perrigault, who, having spent some time on Guadeloupe, stopped off at Port of Spain on his way back to France.

M. Bouge, who had been administering the affairs of the island colony since last June, had been noted for his religious zeal when Governor of the French penal settlement at Cayenne, French Guiana, popularly known since the Dreyfus affair, as Devil's Island. Through his representations that settlement's cure was replaced by a bishop. He had been at Guiana not quite a year when he was transferred to Guadeloupe, one Governor after another of which had been recalled, or had resigned, because of their inability to cope with the rising tide of Voodooism. Guadeloupe, which lies between the islands of Montserrat and Dominica, was settled by the French in 1635, and was one of the first of the West Indies to indulge in organized slave trade from the western coast of Africa. It became a sort of clearing house for this traffic, due to which Voodooism was first introduced among the islands and was developed by the surviving Indians.

In 1848 slavery was abolished at Guadeloupe, but the descendants of the imported blacks did not take kindly to free work with uncertain wages. So the merchants, who dealt in sugar and boxwood, began to import coolies to toil in the fields and forests. The blacks soon initiated them into the mysteries of

Voodoo worship. It is believed that the coolies, like the Indians, added a few bits of magic of their own.

The population of Guadeloupe at the last census totaled a few over 200,000. Among these were 8641 whites born in France, about the same number of whites born elsewhere, 15,000 East Indian coolies, and about 150,000 Negroes and half-breeds. There are more than 200 elementary schools on the island and these are attended by 13,000 pupils, who aside from learning the three Rs are supposed to receive religious instruction.

The Association Law in France followed by the rupture with the Vatican 30 years ago had repercussions in Guadeloupe. There was a general let-down in religious instruction and Voodooism began to get in its fine work in the elementary schools, and soon became the dismay of the authorities.

On the Prevalence of Superstition

TWO INVESTIGATORS connected with Teachers college, Columbia university, have been trying, by questionnaires and interviews, to get some measurement of the extent to which old superstitions still hold their sway over the minds of contemporary Americans. To avoid unprofitable controversy, they did not include any religious beliefs or practices under the category of superstition but directed their inquiry solely to those widely accepted but scientifically groundless beliefs which might be classed as folk-lore. What they found is that everybody has at least one pet superstition, and many have more. Even the educated have not learned sufficiently to distinguish between hearsay and reliable evidence. If this age were as scientific as we sometimes say it is, and if the spirit of skepticism (which means demanding evidence and scrutinizing it critically) were as general as it is often supposed to be by those who mourn the decay of faith, it would scarcely be possible to find so many people cherishing four-leafed clovers and rabbits' feet, or fearing the baleful influence of Friday and the number thirteen. (Two years ago, at

the annual dinner given by the trustees to the faculty of one of our largest universities, the guests were seated at fifty numbered tables. There was no table thirteen!) These minor and harmless superstitions both reveal and perpetuate the habit of uncritical credulity. Credulous and uncritical minds are the natural prey of demagogues and the most fertile seed-beds for propaganda of every kind.

"Wishing Tree" That Ended Rain Is Planted In Harlem

New York's Superstitious Are Happy Because Scraggly Sapling Takes Root And Immediately Displays Its Power; High Officials Help Celebrate

By United Press.

NEW YORK, Nov. 6.—Harlem was happy today because its new "wishing tree" took root and displayed its power immediately.

The fact that it was only a scraggly sapling, wrapped in burlap like a mummy, meant nothing to the negro colony for Bill Robinson, mayor of Harlem, proudly announced: "We rubbed that tree and it stopped raining."

The official planting of the leafless sapling by rhythmic shovelers gave all the superstitious new courage. They had been without a "wishing tree" since the city planning removed an old elm where thousands had made wishes for 30 years or more.

Some Came True

Some of those wishes came true, so Harlem wanted a new tree. It has it today after grand ceremonies attended by Mayor Fiorello H. LaGuardia and Park Commissioner Robert Moses.

Syncopation prevailed during the entire service. Even those who composed the shovel squad swayed as they chanted:

"Sing your shovels high! Swing your shovels low! Gonna plant this tree 'fore the sun goes down."

Shoveling and chanting were not too tiring, for the park department had dug a neat hole. Then, too, the shovels were silvered with red handles, vastly different from those used for common work.

'So Here 'Tis'

Bill Robinson, the mayor who also is known for his tap dancing, led the shovelers without adding one wrinkle to his frock coat, without upsetting the jaunty angle of his high hat, and above all without getting mud on his gold police department badge.

Harlem left nothing to chance. The sapling was planted within

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SUPERSTITION

PEOPLE laugh at the superstitions of others and yet most of us believe in various fateful omens. A Miami negro arraigned for attacking a preacher explained he did so because the minister sprinkled hard luck powder on the steps of his home. The pastor said it was only ashes from his pipe.

It is hard to believe that such heathenish fears are held by anybody in a nation of education. Yet surveys made throughout the United States among children and adults show superstition is almost universal. Drs. Caldwell

and Lundeen of Teachers College in New York have conducted investigations for 10 years. They have found that women are more superstitious than men, that people in the country are claimed by such beliefs to a greater extent than city folks, that no one is entirely free.

Their latest survey among pupils in a junior high school in New Rochelle, N. Y., showed young people, despite their modern schooling, are likewise victims of false ideas and believers in luck, that black cats are evil omens. Peculiar teachings become traditions and are more widely accepted than honest truths. It is difficult to drive out of minds the superstitions that come down out of the dark ages and ignorance of the past. And all of us can cite instances to prove that the cry of the bird in the night, that a pin left lying in our path, that putting on the left shoe first are poison powder